

Lake Michigan Fisheries Team
July 5-6, 2005
DNR Service Center – Sturgeon Bay

Draft Notes –prepared by Bill Horns

Present: Paul Peeters, Tom Hansen, Brad Eggold, Mike Toney, Sue Marcquenski, Mike Hansen, Pradeep Hirethota, Mike Donofrio, Steve Hogler, Kevin Kapuscinski, Matt Mangan, Mike Kitt, George Boronow, Charlie Verhoeven, Lee Meyers, Mike Staggs, Bill Horns, Steve Fajfer, Mark Opgenorth, Matt Coffaro, John Netto

1. Review/approve meeting notes from March 11, 2005

2. Brief updates

Time was allowed for short updates and reminders of topics of interest. The following will be mentioned.

- Introduce Matt Mangan.
- Great Lakes Regional Collaboration – July 7 release of draft Restoration Strategy for 60 day public comment period.
- Walleye stocking in the Milwaukee River.
- Streamside rearing of sturgeon on the Milwaukee and Manitowoc Rivers.
- Michigan's planned short-term cut in coho stocking in 2007.
- Possible WDNR support for the proposed MSU decision-analysis center.
- Policy regarding use of Perca for non-fisheries work. (Brad will write a new project or amend an existing project to describe Cladophora work.)
- Stocking quota issues, if any
- Kevin Naze's Conservation Congress resolutions.
- Request for a northern pike spearing season on Green Bay/Lake Michigan.
- Sampling designs for assessing cooling water intakes. (Mike Staggs will renew request of WT for some kind of formalized request for help regarding permitting issues.)
- Frequency of graded-mesh chub assessments. (deferred)
- Status of commercial fishing regulation re-write.
- Review of spring CLC meeting.
- Plans regarding a tour of the Barney by Senator Feingold.

3. Discussion with Mike Staggs

Background. Mike Staggs led a discussion of some general questions related to commercial fishing and the Lake Michigan Fisheries Forum: How can we work better with the commercial fishing industry to avoid unnecessary acrimony and confrontation regarding commercial fishing issues? Is the Forum serving its intended purpose of helping us find consensus on controversial issues?

Action. Discussion.

4. Assessment of stocked salmonines in streams

Background. Steve Hogler has conducted some preliminary assessments of salmonines in the Kewaunee River following stocking. This pertains to a major gap in our knowledge, namely what influences survival in streams of stocked fish, especially steelhead. Steve reviewed the available data.

Action. Discussion. There are some unanswered questions: Can we develop estimates of the numbers of stocked fish that survive to enter the lake? Can we get the average stocking size of steelhead increased? Are we stocking before (or during) smoltification? If not, can we do so?

5. Nearshore rainbow trout program

Background. This program is summarized in Steve Hogler's annual report. We are at the point of deciding what we have learned from the experimental stocking that has been conducted and how we want to pursue the program in the future. We have options: 1) terminate the program, 2) continue stocking Arlees obtained from FWS (Kamloops will not continue to be available from Minnesota, except to establish a brood stock), 3) establish a captive brood stock for one or both strains, and 4) establish a feral brood stock for one or both strains.

Action. Discussion. Team Nearshore will convene to discuss these options and develop a recommendation.

6. Yellow perch regulations (Wednesday morning)

Background. Under present rules, on July 1, 2006, the total allowable commercial harvest of yellow perch from Green Bay reverts from 20,000 pounds to 200,000 pounds. The very large 2003 GB yellow perch year class promises to support an expanded fishery, and commercial fishers have asked that the Department consider increasing the harvest limit before that date. Whatever is done in the short term regarding commercial and sport limits, I would like to follow through on the tactic III.A.1.d of the Lake Michigan Integrated Fisheries Management Plan: *Explore ways to automate commercial harvest limit setting*. I will presented a proposal under which annual commercial harvest limits would rise and fall in proportion to the previous year's estimated recreational harvest.

Action. a) Rule-making to adjust sport and commercial limits. The following course was adopted: As early as possible, John Netto will obtain 2004 data from Matt Mangan and run the SCAA model to estimate the status of the yellow perch population at the start of the 2004 fishing season. Matt, John, Bill Horns, Mike Donofrio, and Justine (?) will promptly draft a proposal for review by the LMFT (via e-mail) and consideration by Mike Staggs. It is hoped that we can bring a proposal to the August NRB for approval of hearings in October and adoption as early as December, in the hope that even with unexpected delays we will be able to a rule change in place before the commercial season opens on May 20, 2006. Those hearings would have the added benefit of CPE data from the August trawl series. In the August presentation to the NRB we would point out that because additional data will be available before final adoption, we will be open to adjustments in the initially-proposed commercial and sport limits. b) Automating commercial harvest limits. I presented a proposal under which the Green Bay total allowable annual commercial harvest of yellow perch for any year would be a function of the most recently estimated open-water sport harvest. This idea received an extended discussion that included the following points: This is a significant change in how we do business and will benefit from an outreach effort, including consultation with the Forum, to help resolve misgivings and prepare the affected parties. Perhaps some kind of stake-holder work group could be formed to evaluate competing ideas for automating harvest and bag limits. An alternative is to have the commercial harvest limit vary automatically with the SCAA model's estimate of population size, either as a direct proportion or following one of the harvest policies were been outlined by John Netto in his January white paper. My proposal would require a sustained commitment to the creel survey, but could allow a significant reduction (money and staff time) in investment in other yellow perch assessment work. It might be prudent to place a maximum on the commercial harvest that could be allowed. An alternative is to include the August trawl survey data in the annual adjustment (perhaps as a check when the creel estimate is very large). To compensate for variability in the creel survey results, perhaps a two-year rolling average could be used.

7. Cormorants

Background. Mike Staggs, Tom Hauge, and Signe Holtz have agreed to draft a formal charge to the Cormorant Team that has been meeting informally. The charge would specify a timetable and process for developing a control strategy for 2006.

Action. Discussion.

8. Lakewide stocking of salmonines

Background. On April 9 the Lake Michigan agencies held a conference entitled, “Status of Chinook Salmon in Lake Michigan”. The conference highlighted concerns about salmonine current stocking levels. On June 29, the Lake Michigan Committee met to discuss stocking options for next year and outline a public process for developing a lakewide stocking policy for 2006. In August the LMC will meet with the fish chiefs to discuss the matter further.

Action. Discussion.

9. Estimation of natural reproduction by chinook salmon

Background. A central issue in the discussion about stocking levels is the magnitude of natural reproduction by chinook salmon. Rough estimates have been made, but I think these may be little better than educated guesses. The problem, of course, is how best to mark stocked fish. The CLC has agreed to seek federal funding for the purchase and operation of mass-marking equipment (one-time cost of \$12.7M, annual operating cost of \$2.8M). Even if that initiative is successful, the new system would not be operational until 2008 at the earliest. Because of the importance of the question, I have asked the LMC and LMTC to explore re-establishing other marking methods (e.g., OTC, thermal marking, fin clips) in the interim.

Action. Discussion. The discussion focused on OTC marking. Michigan believes that OTC marks are reliable (low rate of false negatives) if applied using their protocol. In the past we have refused to follow that protocol because it seemed to be in violation of the FDA permit. I assume that Sue Marcquenski still has that concern, but I will discuss the matter with her again. Brad raised the question of whether Michigan followed an appropriate “blind” assessment method in judging the reliability of OTC marks in Lake Huron. Paul suggested that using blank (uncoded) wire tags might be cost-effective.

10. A Lake Trout Restoration Plan for Lake Michigan

Background. In May the Lake Michigan Lake Trout task group completed a draft of the new lake trout restoration plan for Lake Michigan. It is now in the hands of the Lake Michigan Committee, which will lay out a process and timetable for finalizing the plan.

Action. Discussion. This discussion was brief, but touched on questions of where lake trout should be stocked, to what extent they should be stocked to provide sport and commercial fishing opportunities, what strains should be used, and whether how, when, and whether alewives should be suppressed to allow natural reproduction by lake trout. This will be discussed further at the next LMFT meeting and the LMFT will recommend a Department position on the matter.

11. Whitefish

Background. 1) What steps can we take toward tactic III.A.3.a of the LMIFMP: *Explore new techniques to assess juvenile whitefish.* 2) Since the whitefish population is not shared between recreational and commercial fishers, should we consider giving commercial fishers greater latitude in setting harvest limits?

Action. Discussion.

12. Great Lakes spotted muskies

Background. Steps are being taken toward importing gametes from Lake Huron, including health screening. Kevin Kapuscinski has some results from this spring’s surveys.

Action. Mike Donofrio, Kevin, and Sue will draft a protocol/plan for moving ahead, for review by DATCP.

13. Communication and coordination regarding stocking dates, places, and times.

Background. In a few instances managers have complained about not being kept fully informed about the dates and places of stocking events. In one or two cases steelhead have been stocked out prematurely because of hatchery issues, without notification of or consultation the relevant manager.

Action. This seems to be an isolated problem. I will bring it up at the annual production meeting. Matt and Lee will also talk with Dick Rebicek and Mark Opgenorth about it.

14. Requests for live wild fish for research.

Background. We have recently received request for live fish from wild populations. Fred Binkowski requested yellow perch for aquaculture research by an associate in Nebraska. Trent Sutton requested lake sturgeon for a study of lamprey predation. We have procedures for issuing Scientific Collectors Permits and Al Kaas has a process for handling requests for eggs/fish/tissue from the propagation system. I thought a little discussion of how requests for fish have been handled and should be handled would be in order.

Action. It would be appropriate for someone to develop statewide guidance on this for inclusion in the Fisheries Management Handbook.

15. Next meeting date and location. Thursday, September 8. Lakeshore Technical College.